

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What struck me in this weekend's readings was the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. In this passage, the author speaks about *faith* and how it "looks like something" in the life of Abraham. The first line is a definition of faith:

Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is evidence within our souls of things not seen. If they were seen, then it would not be faith. One of my professors used to say that *faith is a way of seeing*. We all have lenses through which we see the world. Faith is a type of lens through which we see God's finger of love moving in our lives... hidden at times, yet still present. It's basically why I don't believe in coincidence, but, rather, God-incidents – that God has a plan and a contingency for each and everything.

The Letter to the Hebrews continues by describing Abraham's faith: how he left his homeland with no clear idea of where he was going, trusting in God's promise of a new land. God tested Abraham's faith when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac. Remember, Abraham and Sarah had Isaac when they were 100 and 90 years old, respectively! Isaac was the child of the promise of God, the child through which God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky. Yet, here was God telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This was not a test of "blind" obedience to the will of God, but of faith – faith that "**God was able to raise even from the dead**" (Hebrews 11:19). Abraham took the step – the *leap* – of faith that God would raise his son from the dead and give Isaac back to him. The reading goes on to say that Abraham "**received Isaac back as a symbol**" (Hebrews 11:19). A symbol of what? A symbol of Jesus' resurrection from the dead – you see God *is* able to raise from the dead.

The natural question with all of this is: where is my faith in God? It's one thing to have an intellectual faith that says, "I believe that God is out there, and He has manifested Himself in the person of Jesus." It is a completely different thing to say, "My faith in God shapes my life so much that if God didn't exist, then my life would make no sense." We say this every time we say, "Amen." The word *amen* comes from Hebrew, which is based on a word meaning "firm" or "solid." When we say "Amen," we are saying "I believe God (and His promises) are so real, so firm, so solid, that I am going to lean over onto Him – in such a way that were He not there, I would fall over." When we finish stating the Creed at Mass, do we really mean, "**Amen**" – "I believe in all of this in such a way that if it were not true, my life would fall over"? When we receive Communion and we say, "**Amen**," do we really mean that "I believe so much that this Eucharist is really and truly Jesus, and He is the solid foundation on which my life is built"?

Does this make sense? Do you get it? *Faith is the realization of what is hoped for* – that we are able to "see" God's presence so real in our lives that we step out *without a safety net*, because we know He is there, we know He can even raise from the dead.

So here is the test of our faith – When everything in our lives is falling apart, do we lean so far onto God that we know we would fall over if He were not there? When there seems to be no way out, when sickness and death appear in our lives, do we still have faith that God has a plan for this, and He will raise us from the dead? Even if we don't see it? Faith is the *evidence of things not seen*.

Okay, I get it, you're not there... and neither am I; not all the way. So how do we work on this so that we have faith like Abraham? First, by acknowledging that faith is a gift – a gift from God. We can't make ourselves have this faith, forcing our will. Because it is gift, we need to start by asking God for the gift of faith, for greater faith. Like the father begging Jesus for his son's healing, we can cry out, "**I do believe, help my unbelief!**" (Mark 9:24). When we ask, God does give (though not always in the time or way we think). He will give us opportunities to practice faith. Don't be surprised that if you ask for more faith, God will put some difficult circumstances before you which will give you the chance to practice faith. While this may seem scary, remember that He is a faithful God, and will honor His promises – so that if we take that first step in faith, *He will show us that He is faithful* – He will be with us in the trial, and show us His love.

Let us ask God for the gift of greater faith, and also for the courage we need to step out in faith, trusting in His incredible love, that He *able to raise even from the dead*. **Amen!**